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CHEMICAL AND BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) WEAPONS

Letter dated 28 January 1993 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the statement delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. F. Botha, in Paris on 14 January 1993, on the occasion of the signing of the chemical weapons convention (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under the item entitled "Chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons".

(Signed) V. R. W. STEWARD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Statement delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa, Mr. R. F. Botha, on the occasion of the signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction in Paris, on 14 January 1993

South Africa takes pride today in becoming an original signatory to the chemical weapons convention.

This is the first multilateral disarmament agreement with an effective and comprehensive verification mechanism that prohibits the production, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer or use of chemical weapons. It also requires the destruction of existing chemical weapons. The carefully devised verification measures, including challenge inspections and routine verifications in the chemical industry, are as promising as they are unprecedented.

South Africa has already acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and has concluded a Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We are also party to the biological weapons convention. In addition, South Africa is prepared to adhere to the Missile Technology Control Regime and, with the approval of other countries, to become a member. The world therefore knows that South Africa fully accepts its global and regional responsibilities and is committed to non-proliferation and disarmament. By signing the chemical weapons convention we have now taken that commitment an important step further.

The South African Government will present draft legislation to Parliament on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is intended as enabling legislation to meet the objectives of the Convention.

We welcome the enthusiastic support which this Convention has received from our fellow African countries. We see this as an important step in strengthening cooperation throughout our continent and our region in freeing Africa from the threat of nuclear as well as chemical weapons. Indeed, South Africa will strongly support initiatives aimed at making Africa the first continent to be declared free of all weapons of mass destruction.

At some point in the future, those who follow us may hopefully look back on today as a turning-point: when mankind finally began to strike a new balance between the requirements of national sovereignty on the one hand, and global responsibility on the other: when the nations of the world, the majority, joined hands and minds to end the nightmare of mass annihilation which we created. The wonders of technology also brought forth monsters to threaten our very existence on this planet, but today we at last took a multilateral step to end and control a particularly heinous category of weapons of mass destruction.

Among God's creations, it seems, no species except our own, Homo sapiens, has engaged as we have in the systematic extermination of members of our own species, for that is what war is, and what weapons are used for. For generation after generation we as a species have gone into battle and occupied ourselves with the wholesale killing of our own kind. Seldom has there been a dearth of funds for the manufacture of tools of war.

Is it too early to hope that we are on the threshold of a new chapter in human history? The historic significance of this multilateral event would be enhanced if it could lead to the channelling of funds and ingenuity into helping the lesser developed world to prosper, a matter which is receiving the serious attention of the South African Government in respect of the application of our own resources.

In Africa, tens of millions of our people face mass extermination through poverty, starvation and disease. We have a historic opportunity, therefore, to turn away from weapons of mass destruction and focus our energies on creating weapons for mass survival and progress.

In meeting this challenge South Africa will play its part in such a great and worthy challenge.